

## **“Smart Growth,” White Flint, and the CR Zone**

After months of in-depth review, the Council adopted the White Flint Sector Plan and a new zone intended to encourage the kind of mixed-use development we want to see there.

### **The White Flint Sector Plan: A Framework for True Smart Growth**

The recently approved White Flint Sector Plan offers great opportunity for true smart-growth development. As adopted by the County Council, the plan puts the area on a path to becoming a model liveable/walkable community.

When the Sector Plan first arrived from the Planning Board, I had serious concerns about it. The Board’s recommendations would have allowed traffic conditions to deteriorate to unacceptable levels - 9 mph on Rockville Pike during the morning peak travel time. During the review of the plan by the Planning Housing and Economic Development Committee (PHED), on which I serve, I repeatedly raised concerns about traffic congestion that could overwhelm the surrounding communities as well as Rockville Pike. I suggested a number of changes that would provide greater protections not only for existing neighborhoods but for new communities to be built in the future. As a result of those discussions, the Council approved a plan that allows development to proceed only if 50% of the employees travel to White Flint via transit, carpooling, walking, or biking. We also included parking restrictions that will take more cars off the road.

No other plan in the County requires a higher percentage use of non-single-occupancy vehicles. My proposal for a rapid transit system on Rockville Pike (part of a countywide system I have been pushing for) should play a major role in making this happen. I hope that a redesigned Rockville Pike will become a model for a major transportation corridor that provides an attractive bike- and pedestrian-friendly environment with trees, wide sidewalks, and street-level retail.

The White Flint Sector Plan has come this far because of a willingness of the community, the County, and the private sector to work together to design a plan with densities suitable for a Metro station area along with the infrastructure needed to support a vibrant mix of residential and commercial uses. However, there are two major issues that still need to be addressed.

First, there must be a financing mechanism that ensures timely build out of infrastructure - improved intersections, streets in a “grid pattern,” and land acquisition for public amenities such as a new elementary school site, a full-service library, a recreation center, a new fire station, a police substation, and green space. The plan we approved takes the area out from under the requirements of the County’s existing traffic congestion review processes where developers pay fees and implement infrastructure improvements in the immediate vicinity of their projects. Instead, developers in White Flint will contribute substantial amounts of money to a development district, eliminating the need for them to implement temporary but costly fixes to the areas around their projects and concentrating funds for area-wide long-term improvements. We agreed to this because it will give developers greater certainty that they will be able to move forward when their projects are ready.

Which brings us to the second major issue: it is absolutely essential to have a process in place that monitors traffic conditions, and if congestion in the area becomes unacceptable there must be remedies. We talk a great deal about giving the developers certainty so that they will invest in projects in this plan, but the residents are investors too, perhaps the biggest investors. They need certainty that the neighborhoods where they live will not be overwhelmed by traffic and air pollution, that their quality of life and investment in their homes will not be degraded. That is why we need to adopt amendments to the Growth Policy that provide an

alternative mechanism for measuring traffic congestion in White Flint and assure the timely build out of the infrastructure necessary to make this plan work.

These are challenges we must confront, matching bold new land use recommendations with adequate financing, implementation, and staging plans that allow the White Flint area to live up to the vision presented in the plan. If we are able to do this, we will truly bring smart growth to Montgomery County.

The Planning Board draft of the White Flint Sector Plan can be found on the Council home page (<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/csltmpl.asp?url=/content/council/index.asp>) - it does not include the changes made by the Council.

### **The Commercial/Residential (CR) Zone**

This is a completely new zone and far from perfect, but in its final version it may be a good match for the White Flint Sector Plan. Although I preferred to stick with other already existing zones, I recommended several changes to improve the CR Zone once it became clear that most of my colleagues on the Council supported its adoption. As a result, we ended up with a zone that will allow some future redeveloped areas to become more dense mixed-use communities, which in turn will encourage residents and businesses to be less dependent on automobiles and more reliant on increased public transit. And in return for greater densities, developers will be required to provide public amenities such as enhanced connectivity and mobility within the built environment, high quality design features, and protection and enhancement of the natural environment. These are good things, but as always, the devil is in the details, so we have limited the application of the CR Zone only to those areas where it is recommended in an approved and adopted master or sector plan. This ensures that its use will be properly vetted in the traditional public master plan or sector plan forums.

I am disappointed that my colleagues did not support a more aggressive requirement in the CR Zone to offset the density increases in White Flint by protecting additional land in the rural parts of the County. We need to rethink how we achieve this important policy goal, something we will be working on in the near future.

I would like to extend my thanks to the many individuals and community groups who raised questions and suggested changes to the White Flint Sector Plan and the CR Zone - your comments were very helpful and had a substantial impact on the final outcome. I intend to remain actively involved in the implementation phases of both the White Flint Sector Plan and the CR Zone to ensure that we achieve our goals for future growth in this high-profile Metro station area without adversely affecting the quality of life for the residents who already live there. That is a matter of basic fairness.